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ABSTRACT

Dialogics as a philosophical principle is, like the dialectics predominant at present in all industrialized countries, based on the duality of life and thought. Dialogics postulates that two thoughts, or two aspirations, or two concepts together make up a whole, simultaneously, each being of equal importance. Play is a dialogic of doing and experiencing. As defined by dialogics, play also connects imaginative consciousness and fantasy with material reality. In addition, play creates a dialogical bridge between physical and psychic/spiritual realms. Play helps a child in his social relationships as well as in the development of his individuality, and play creates a direct relation to time and space. Play has great significance for the creation of a dialogical identity and for the dialogical integration of the contradictory sides of life and of the human personality. This integrative significance is of special importance in our present cultural circumstances. (Author/RH)

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On the Anthropology of Play:

Play as a Way of Dialogical Development

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Play is a mode of life. I am interested in knowing what significance this mode of life, which we call play, has today for child and youth development and for the growth of the human personality in general. Any anthropological answers to this question must be placed within a specific cultural/historical context. My point of departure is, therefore, the situation we find ourselves in in the industrialized West today:

We are in the midst of an electronic industrial revolution. It is a revolution in which one-sided cognitive development is fostered, while at the same time there is an exchange of ideas and an accumulation of information and knowledge taking place on a scale previously unknown to man.

As a result of the division of labour during the course of industrialization, an apartheid of the generations has arisen. Families have become "leisure-time families". Children, youths and adults spend most of their time among their own age group, and the different generations only seldom come together to take part in an event or to share an experience. Families have long since ceased to be a close-knit unit of common experience and no longer do they form a work co-operative and unit of productivity. All this leads to alienation among family members.

In addition, there is world-wide migration. Very often, parents come from different cultures or subcultures. A child of such parents, growing up in that family, develops an identity which is influenced by the different cultural backgrounds of the parents, and, very often added to this, is the culture of the region in which the child is

growing up. Out of this, a multi-cultural identity arises, one which is full of contradiction and tension. However, the dissolution of the extended family, of professional guilds and of stable relations with one's neighbours has not only lead to apartheid of the generations, to the development of multi-cultural identities and to the loss of a sense of social security. Over and above all that, the development of man's personality is no longer holistic. Because of the demands to be met later in life in professions which will be carried out in a materialistic, achievement-oriented society, from early childhood on only certain of a child's qualities and abilites are paritally fostered, while others, which are not recognized as being important for one's development and life, remain neglected. Such partial and one-sided fostering leads to large deficits in vital areas of man's personality, for example, in the area of one's emotional sensitivity or one's sense of social responsibility.

Finally, not only the development of our children and youths is endangered, but also the development of the whole of mankind. Environmental catastrophes, starvation of the masses and nuclear annihilation threaten us all to an unprecedented degree, a fact which everybody knows but few choose to acknowledge.

In times like this, of what possible importance can play be?

Are we not confronted by a world and life situation which is far too grave for there to be room at all for play?

Quite the contrary. Play is much more an extremely serious affair. It is something which offers a crucial chance for the development of life today. This, at least, is the case as long as we believe the ideals of western humanism, that man can and should develop himself

into a whole personality, not only into human beings who mature and ripen as individuals, but also into individuals who have a sense of community and who together share a sense of social responsbility. Even though it is a well-known fact that play nurtures various important aspects of man's personality, a fact which in itself does not fully explain the significance of play, let me just briefly remind you of the most important developmental possibilities which play provides:

Play promotes primary cognitive development. Through play, a child trains his perception, his ability to react and his ability to think. He has his experiences first-hand, that is, he has an immediate experience of his environment. This is important in a culture in which one otherwise has predominantly indirect experiences of the world, through words which describe things, or through pictures which instruct one about the nature of things. The primary nature of experience in play is especially important for a child, not only because it provides him with immediate impressions, but also because it gives him feedback and thereby brings about progress in independent learning.

Play develops what is otherwise generally severely neglected in education, that is, fantasy, "imaginative consciousness" and the realm of ideas. One readily speaks about the creativity of play. In fact, a certain mysticism has come to surround the use of this term. However, the creativity of play concerns very concrete and practical experiences. It means that a child gets stimulated, that ideas arise and that he is able to make intuitive connections between things which he can then translate into actions and thereby effect changes. Through play, a child can realize ideas which are his own and, in

the process, he experiences his own personal innovative potential.

Play is an essential field for social development and for the development of ethical responsibility. In play, a child practises not only social communication and solidarity, but also develops his own value judgements concerning what is right and wrong and what is good and evil in a social context. In the process he experiences social correction and intervention but not only from adults watching from the sidelines, rather from playmates of the same age group in the same social situation. A child learns to take on different roles and responsibilities. Together with the need to fit in, a child also experiences the need to defend his individuality.

In play, a child's aesthetic judgement is also trained. He learns to assess things as beautiful or ugly, and to recognize form and colour by experimenting with different play materials and by making connections between the games he plays.

Finally, reference must be made to the great importance of play for physical skills. A child practises posture and movement in a meaningful context, not in the one-sided manner which will later be the case if he does some kind of sports training programme.

One could add many more areas of personality which are furthered by play to those mentioned above. But the many-sided possibilities of development which play affords and which are often described, are only the starting point of our study. Of greater importance to the dialogical viewpoint presented here is the fact that play is a kind of training in mental health. This is above all true because in play a child uses those abilities and talents that are neglected in everyday life in an industrialized society and are barely paid

attention to in the raising and educating of a child. To give some examples:

Play makes non-verbal expression possible through body language. Non-verbal expression through play is an especially appropriate means for a child to live out his emotions and to communicate who he is.

In the process, a child has access to language through pictures in contrast to our abstract language of information. Language through imagery is more many-sided, more comprehensive and more emotional than the abstract language of information. A child has the ability to perceive symbols and imagery, to express himself directly through them and to make himself understood.

With both these possibilities of non-verbal expression through the language of pictures, a child has considerably more opportunity not only to work through his experiences and impressions, but also to anticipate experiences with which he will be confronted in dealing with adults and which are very often both threatening and frightening for a child. Play's application in play therapy rests above all upon this cathartic function. But both the compensatory and the cathartic possibilities of play have a much more general and more important prophylactic significance in terms of mental health.

Play's many possibilities have brought about the creation of numerous play theories. I shall name just a few: the theory of hyperactivity by Spencer, the theory of repetition by Hall, the assimilation theory of Gross, the drive theory of Hall and others, the individual psychology theory of the Alfred Adler school, the cathartic theory by Freud, the cognitive play theory by Piaget and the activation theory by Heckhausen.

Each one of these play theories singles out one specific aspect of play and builds a theory upon it. This kind of scientific thinking is characteristic of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Scientific thinking, as we have understood it up until now, is subject to a fundamental limitation: the more accurate a scientific observation and description, the more specific a technical point of view, the more precise a theoretical model, the smaller is the area being explored, the more one-sided the interpretation and the more limited the validity of each statement. Essential, however, to thinking about man and his life and social relations are contradictory poles, which I call "bi-poles"; they seem obvious to everyone, for example, body and soul, heredity and environment, health and illness, theory and practice, tradition and innovation.

There is a fundamental difference whether we take processes or organs as the subject of science or whether we deal with living human beings. It is not the practical limitations and specialization of science which are catastrophic, but the way in which we substitute one-sidedness for wholeness. We pick out one or the other of the elements of a "bi-pole", because it suits the momentary purpose of some research project, and quickly and completely forget the other half. We even identify with the aspect we have chosen, and feuds arise between, say, the proponents of "primary" heredity and the adherents of an equally "primary" environmental theory, between those defending the pre-eminence of the "soma" and those propounding the primacy of the "psyche".

In the most varied fields of scientific endeavour, that pole of a bipolar problem which is not the immediate subject of investigation is lost to sight. This is the methodological consequence of one-track thinking caught in contradictory concepts. This approach, when

applied to living man, saps him of his vitality, which has its roots in the tension of bipolarity. He can no longer be perceived, experienced and treated as a whole "man in all his contradictoriness".

Dialogics as a philosophical principle is, like the dialectics predominant at present in all industrialized countries, based on the duality of life and thought. It postulates, however, that two thoughts (which no one can think simultaneously), or two aspirations (which no-one can realize simultaneously), or two concepts (which are mutually exclusive, each with its own range) together make up a whole, simultaneously (not sequentially), each being of equal importance (with no claim to superiority). That is bipolar thought. The tension, or the contradiction, between the two poles, which in another form is part of dialectics, is no longer the invisible force behind a manichean struggle or a temporary evil which will pass. Contradiction and tension are to be welcomed as a sign of vitality and wholeness, but there must be not the slightest claim to superiority from either side. This bipolar structure of thought should be familiar to physicians, who are aware, to use an analogy, of the importance of tension in the cell wall, or in a biological organism it is a feature of life which is maintained by concurrent, equal but polar processes and forces.

Dialogics thus rejects the intolerance of confrontation as embodied in dialectics. Furthermore, it must be distinguished from "monologics", the attempt which, since the Middle Ages, has been made time and again, in medicine too, to reduce to one single point of view or principle, and thereby to dominate, all living matter and all knowledge. It must also be distinguished from the indifference of coexistence (in which the two sides tolerate each other but do not cooperate as a whole greater than its parts) and from the half-

heartedness of compromise (in which the two opponents surrender rather than defend their positions).

In contrast to the complementary principles of yin and yang in Oriental philosophy, dialogics stresses the contradiction and tension inherent in the "bipole". It considers harmonization to be just as much an illusion as subsequent synthesis. We must rather learn in future to feel, think and work, both as individuals and as social beings, with dialogical tension, with contradiction which must be affirmed.

In the history of Western philosophy, dialogical thinking can be traced back to antiquity, but only in the 19th and 20th centuries did it gain its present-day importance. It received a major impulse from the thinking of MARTIN BUBER and was developed into a system of dialogics by HERMANN LEVIN GOLDSCHMIDT, a contemporary philosopher living in Zurich, whose work is quite unjustly but not fortuitously little known. Although usually only implicit and poorly formulated, dialogical tendencies can be found in various contemporary scientific developments such as nuclear physics, theology, pedagogy, psychology and medicine. Our purpose, however, is not to quote authorities but briefly to discuss some "bipoles" which are particularly relevant to play.

In what follows, I would like to mention some dialogical aspects of play. In doing so, I will be using more specific terms than I did in my description of the basics of dialogics.

Play is a dialogics of doing and experiencing. In our industrialized society, we separate work-time from leisure-time, our working hours from our after-hours. During work-time, one is active. During free-time one is mostly passive and relaxed. Play is quite different.

Like pre-industrial work, play unites doing and experiencing, movement and perception. Through this union, play knows neither the boredom of the assembly line, nor the passivity of T.V. addiction. In the future of industrial societies, this union of doing and experiencing will once again become meaningful because, as a result of the electronic revolution, we will be given more and more free time. In our free-time which resembles play we must then focus on trying to overcome the apartheid of the generations. What is called "active leisure-time" must be more than a fleeing from experience, than hyper-activity or than simply a pseudo-experience because the experience itself is programmed and controlled, for example, in the case of mass tourism. For an holistic and humanistic development of personality, doing and experiencing must come together with both sides being of equal importance. One can observe this by watching any creative game of a small child.

As defined by dialogics, play also connects imaginative consciousness and fantasy with material reality. A child is given the opportunity to actualize impulses from his imaginative consciousness and fantasy and in the process, to experience what the possibilities and limits of reality are and vice-versa, that is, real experiences become stimulants for his imaginative consciousness. The dialogical union of both forms of consciousness prevents imaginative consciousness from becoming split off from reality. Such a split can be seen in the condition of drug states or in psychosis. The neglect of imaginative consciousness in our upbringing and education is presumably also one reason why so many youths and adults turn to drugs, that is, in order to once again have access to their own imaginative consciousness. The splitting-off of fantasy and imagination creates

delusions and feeds illusions which, under some circumstnaces, could be destructive for a whole culture, for example, if, in some insane manner we were to believe that we could save ourselves in an atomic world war by undertaking some kind of preventative measures.

In addition, play creates a dialogical bridge between physical and psychic/spiritual realms. Here too our culture is split. On the one hand, we spend many hours performing so-called "activities" which involve only brain-work, or the repetition of certain thought-processes. Such work requires neither our senses nor any physical activity. As compensation, we then go aimlessly and meaninglessly jogging, or we get high on the meaning of other peoples lives as it is brought to us through the media. Play, on the other hand, simultaneously encourages both aspects of existance - the physical as well as the psychic /spiritual, the one concurrent with the other.

Play helps a child in his social relationships as well as in the development of his individuality. He learns autonomy as well as solidarity. In play, he is dependent upon others, but in his role as player, he must remain independent and accept responsibility for himself. Whereas otherwise in our culture we have an often destructive dialectics between self-realization and loss of identity in the masses, between ego-trip and helper's syndrome, in play both these opposing tendencies come together. Thus a child not only learns about his own abilities, learns what he can achieve and can do as an individual, and experiences his own individual power, but also he simultaneously experiences social limits and being dependent on others.

To give a final example of the dialogical structure of play, let me point out that play creates a direct relation to time and space, a

relation that has been largely lost due to our mechanized life style. By building constructions out of simple building blocks, a child is already learning the length of time it takes to build a tower, as well as simultaneously experiencing spatial and physical laws. Or perhaps you remember the game of hide-and-seek and remember how endless time seemed to pass when your playmate, who should have found you, either didn't look for you or couldn't find you.

These five examples: doing and experiencing, the physical and the psychic /spiritual, individuality and community, time and space - these five examples should be sufficient but they could, of course, be easily extended further. What is crucial from my standpoint presented here is that in each case both areas of personality or both aspects are produced in play together, simultaneously, and both are of equal importance. Each of the poles, however, is an area unto itself, which follows its own laws. Between the two areas there are contradictions and tensions, for example between individual and social development, or between physical and psychic/spiritual needs and tendencies. These contradictions and inner or social conflicts are not to be resolved. Rather, they are characteristics of dialogical bi-poles and of the vitality of human life itself. In play, a child has the chance to practise living with these contradictions and tensions, to endure them and to hold them within boundaries which are bearable for his own self and for his social surroundings.

Play, therefore, has great significance for the creation of a dialogical identity and for the dialogical integration of the contradictory sides of life and of the human personality. This integrative significance is of special importance in our present cultural circumstances.

Before I finish, allow me to cast a glance outside of our industrialized society, into any culture which stands at the threshold of industrialization. In these cultures, there are still extended families, and there are families which still function as units of productivity, forming communities of shared experience. In such a family, a little child is given a definite social role very early on in life, and this also includes a particular task which he must perform. These tasks often push these young people to the limits of their endurance and capabilities. But, these tasks are meaningful within the framework of the family's workload. They are necessary tasks, for example, fetching water or watching over the cattle. Through this, a child is given a definite place in a pre-industrial society. In addition, he has an immediate daily experience of the work roles of adults and his older brothers and sisters, roles into which he himself will later grow. In this way, child and youth development is integerated through participation in family work commitments. Only when a culture sinks into poverty, when slums arise on the outskirts of industrial cities, is this integrated child development destroyed. As long as it is in tact, however, play is of only minor importance compared to its role in an industrial society, and a child's play-age is restricted to the very first years of life. At the same time, however, play has a firm position in the society of adults, for example, in religious rituals.

Many cultures which are today making the transition over to industrialization are in danger of developing the same cultural/ historical deficits that we have already experienced in our cultural development. This includes the one-sided fostering of cognitive development, because of its importance for industrialization. This leads to what has been mentioned earlier, that is, the splitting up

of the personality and to the neglect of those areas of personality which are not needed in a materialistic and achievement-oriented society. The revaluation of play and the fostering of play are, therefore, also important for those cultures which are only at the beginning of industrialization. If we lend great value to play, if we watch children and youths playing and are able to learn about the possibilities and needs of man, then this may contribute towards correcting cultural/historical one-sidedness and may help to avoid impending faulty developments.

Today, it is important to understand that the insights which we can get from play and from people playing are based upon the fact that man can and must live dialogically if he does not want to perish. That means, he must live a life which equally includes individuality and communal life, the physical and the psychic/spiritual, imagination and reality, experiencing and doing, and always the one simultaneously with the other, and both having equal importance.

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ABSTRACT

On the Anthropology of Play:
Play as a Way of Dialogical Debelopment

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Play is a mode of life. I am interested in knowing what significance this mode of life, which we call play, has today for child and youth development and for the growth of the human personality in general.

Dialogics as a philosophical principle is, like the dialectics predominant at present in all industrialized countries, based on the duality of life and thought. It postulates, however, that two thoughts (which no-one can think simultaneously), or two aspirations (which no-one can realize simultaneously), or two concepts (which are mutually exclusive, each with its own range) together make up a whole, simultaneously (not sequentially), each being of equal importance (with no claim to superiority).

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As defined by dialogics, play also connects imaginative consciousness and fantasy with material reality.

In addition, play creates a dialogical bridge between physical and psychic/spiritual realms.
Play helps a child in his social relationships as well as in the development of his individuality; and - as a final example of its dialogical structure - play creates a direct relation to time and space.
Play has great significance for the creation of a dialogical identity and for the dialogical integration of the contradictory sides of life and of the human personality. This integrative significance is of sepcial importance in our present cultural circumstances.